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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Letter dated 29 January 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to an Expert Workshop on "Fostering the Linkage between Energy and Sustainable Development within the International Institutions', which, in preparation for the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21, was hosted by the Austrian Ministry for the Environment, Youth and Family Affairs, and held in Vienna from 22 to 24 January 1997. The conclusions and recommendations of the Workshop are summarized in the enclosed report.**

I would highly appreciate if you would arrange for the present letter and the enclosed report to be circulated as an official document for the Inter-sessional Working Group of the Commission on Sustainable Development, for the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21, under the respective and appropriate agenda items.

(Signed) Ernst SUCHARIPA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of
Austria to the United Nations

* To be issued as E/CN.17/1997/1.

** The report is circulated in the language of submission only.

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Annex

REPORT FROM THE EXPERT WORKSHOP "FOSTERING THE LINKAGE BETWEEN ENERGY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS"

(Vienna, 22-24 January 1997)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In preparation for the special session of the General Assembly in June 1997 for the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Rio commitments, the Austrian Ministry for the Environment, Youth and Family Affairs hosted an Expert Workshop in Vienna from 22 to 24 January 1997 on "Fostering the Linkage between Energy and Sustainable Development within the International Institutions". The meeting was chaired by Ms. Irene Freudenschuss-Reichl, Director of the Department for International Affairs at the Austrian Ministry for the Environment, Youth and Family Affairs, and entrusted the function of Rapporteur to Professor Wim C. Turkenburg, Utrecht University and member of the United Nations Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development (UNCNRSEED).

2. As an input to this Workshop, Ms. Joke M. Waller-Hunter, Director of the Division on Sustainable Development of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development presented the report of the Secretary-General, prepared in a United Nations inter-agency process, entitled "Inventory of Ongoing Energy-Related Programmes and Activities of Entities within the UN System, on Coordination of Such Activities and on Arrangements Needed to Foster the Linkage between Energy and Sustainable Development within the System". As a second input to the Workshop, Professor Thomas B. Johansson, Director of the Energy and Atmosphere Programme of UNDP, presented an executive summary of the report "Energy After Rio: Prospects and Challenges" prepared by UNDP in collaboration with external organizations (International Energy Initiative; Energy 21; Stockholm Environment Institute) and in consultation with the secretariat of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. Further input was delivered by a number of other participants to the Workshop, partly in response to the above-mentioned documents.[1]

3. Based on these inputs and on the lively and stimulating discussions between all the participants, in this report the conclusions and recommendations of the Workshop are summarized.

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[1] The representative of IAEA, Mr. Morris Rosen, expressed reservations as to the title and content of section 2.4.2 on "Nuclear Energy and Nuclear Weapons Proliferation" of the UNDP report. According to IAEA, it addresses in a misleading manner questions related to non-proliferation and thereby contains an unacceptable criticism of the NPT regime. In the opinion of IAEA, this matter is outside the scope of a UNDP report.

II. ENERGY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4. Agenda 21 and other internationally agreed plans of action adopted at major United Nations conferences as well as energy-related environmental and other relevant conventions provide a global framework containing goals and objectives for environmentally sustainable socio-economic development, and specified actions related to energy use and supply to realize them. Taken together, the necessary actions imply major changes in the world's energy systems.

5. The Workshop envisaged that a sustainable energy future, in the emerging world characterized by globalization and liberalization of markets, could come about through a combination of economic, regulatory and other measures to achieve economic efficiency and to direct market actors towards energy investments and activities that contribute to realizing the goals and objectives of the major conferences.

6. The Workshop concluded that energy is at the core of the sustainable development debate, as it plays a key role in achieving the economic, social and environmental objective of sustainable development.

7. Access to - and therefore adequate availability of - energy services is a prerequisite to achieving the socio-economic development that is required to improve the quality of life and satisfy basic human needs, including access to jobs, food, running water, housing, health services, education and communication. An adequate supply of energy is urgently needed in developing regions, in particular in the least developed countries, remote rural areas and small island developing States, where over 2 billion people have little or no access to commercial energy resources. It is also a prerequisite for sustainable development in the industrialized world and in the countries with economies in transition. The supply of energy should be secure and reliable. Also it is essential that access to energy services and the supply of energy be realized at affordable costs; that the development and application of energy resources and technologies be realized in a socially acceptable manner; and that the development of energy sources creates opportunities for local employment and new industrial activity. The Workshop also recognized the importance for relevant demand security for energy exporting countries.

8. The further development of the world energy system should in itself be consistent with the pursuit of sustainability: it should not endanger the quality of life of present and future generations, and should not exceed the carrying capacity of existing ecosystems. This means that the production and consumption of energy should be clean and safe. It also means that the use of scarce resources to fulfil present needs for energy services should not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs for the same services. This in turn requires an efficient use of resources and a timely development of alternative resources. The indicated efficiency is also required to reduce the production of waste, pollutants and greenhouse gases. Finally, given the pursuit of sustainability, it is important that the development of short-term options not hinder the development of options that in the longer term contribute better to sustainability.

9. The Workshop noted that the current patterns of the production, distribution and use of energy are in general not sustainable, in particular because the current approach to energy worldwide is still characterized by a stronger emphasis on energy supply than on demand without due regard to its social, economic and environmental consequences.

10. The Workshop concluded that there is an urgent need to develop an energy future that contributes to sustainable development. Such a strategy has to include: (i) a more efficient use of energy and energy-intensive materials; (ii) an increased use of safe and environmentally sound energy technologies, in particular modernized renewable sources of energy; (iii) a shift towards an environmentally sound, safe, efficient and cost-effective production and use of depletable energy resources making full use of new technology generations. The Workshop noted with interest the new technological developments, referred to in the UNDP report providing opportunities for using fossil fuels in ways compatible with sustainable development.

III. TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE ENERGY FUTURE

11. The Workshop concluded that all actors - Governments, the international community, the private sector, the scientific community and non-governmental organizations - should pursue the development, the promotion and the implementation of policies and programmes, as appropriate, designed to realize a sustainable energy future. Major changes in the current energy systems are urgently needed. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General and in the UNDP report, this demands a concerted effort of all actors concerned, including the United Nations.

12. Enhanced efforts to move towards a sustainable energy future should take as a starting point the recommendations of major United Nations conferences dealing with this subject, like the ones made in Agenda 21, as well as the actions and processes initiated to achieve a sustainable energy future and the outcomes of relevant discussions on this item.

13. The Workshop found that the pursuit and implementation of integrated strategies towards a sustainable energy future are urgently needed both in the decision-making and the implementation stage. These strategies should be based on the subsidiarity principle, taking into account the specific mandates of relevant United Nations bodies, and the key roles of local stakeholders, the private sector, national Governments and other regional and international organizations.

14. The Workshop also found that the United Nations has an important role to play in developing a reference framework for the energy-related activities of the United Nations system based on a common understanding of a sustainable energy future and providing synergies to the activities, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General. So far, no common strategy has been developed, as already indicated by UNCNRSEED and confirmed by the reports of the Secretary-General and UNDP. The development and adoption of such a strategy could greatly increase the coherence and effectiveness of the United Nations activities in pursuit of energy systems that contribute to sustainable development.

15. The common strategy to guide the United Nations system should be developed through an open and participatory process. It should foster partnership for sustainable energy development with relevant actors outside the United Nations system, taking into account that the United Nations, in financial terms, is only a modest player in the energy field.

16. The development of a common United Nations strategy towards a sustainable energy future should build on the experience gained so far in inter-agency cooperation and coordination in the energy field, as recommended in the report of the Secretary-General. Through this process, and after extensive consultation, the common framework should be submitted, through UNCNRSEED and the Commission on Sustainable Development, to the Economic and Social Council and to the General Assembly for consideration and approval.

IV. FOSTERING THE LINKAGE BETWEEN ENERGY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ON AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL LEVEL

17. The Commission on Sustainable Development was recognized as the appropriate United Nations forum for intergovernmental discussion on a global approach towards a sustainable energy future at the policy level. In the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the local and the regional potential to achieve a sustainable energy future should be fully harnessed.

18. The Workshop recommended a dedicated session of the Commission on Sustainable Development towards a sustainable energy future. This session might be organized in the year 2001, on the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy, held at Nairobi, even though an earlier consideration of this subject is recommended, given the needs and the possibilities of a major change in current energy systems. In addition, the Workshop wanted to stress that an appropriate preparation of this energy session should be ensured upon the approval of the 1998-2002 work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development. In this preparation, major stakeholders should be involved.

19. The Workshop also found that a process should be devised to ensure linkages between intergovernmental meetings on energy-related issues in and outside the United Nations body, in order to enhance the coherence in these meetings and to avoid duplication.

20. The Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development is the only body in the United Nations that addresses all aspects of the energy field at the expert level. Its effectiveness could be enhanced. Consequently its mode of operation should be addressed following the recommendations given in the report of the Secretary-General (para. 65 - see appendix). The Workshop recommended to the Commission on Sustainable Development and to the Economic and Social Council to examine ways and means in which UNCNRSEED could continue to play a useful role in furthering United Nations policy discussions in the field of energy after 1997, pending the outcome of the review process pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/227. The Workshop suggested that nominations to this Committee pay due respect to its expert character. In addition, ways for a more active non-governmental

organization participation might be found. Finally, it is proposed that the Economic and Social Council should investigate the possibilities to change the name of the Committee to, for example, the Energy Committee.

V. NEW FORUMS FOR SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

21. The Workshop identified the need for concerted efforts at the global, regional, national and local level between consumers, private investors, energy industries, Governments, non-governmental organizations and - where appropriate - multilateral institutions to promote a sustainable energy future that will ensure that energy fulfils its potential of being a key instrument for sustainable human development.

22. In this context, the Workshop especially identified a need for neutral forums, for the discussion of necessary steps towards sustainable energy systems, for the pursuit of common understanding and cooperation, and exchanging information on technology development and dissemination. These forums are needed both at the local, regional and global levels, to create an atmosphere where all stakeholders act in partnership while not undermining the competitiveness of own industries.

23. The Workshop recommended that the usefulness of a new global forum should be further considered, starting with an open-ended process, building on the interested parties, and focusing on selected issues. The initiating parties would have to further define and develop the objectives and working forms. The Workshop noted with appreciation that the representative of the Danish Government indicated a probable willingness of his Government to consider active support for such a process.

VI. IMPROVING INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

24. To support concerted action towards achieving a sustainable energy future, the cooperation between United Nations agencies having a mandate for energy and the coordination of the energy activities of these agencies should be improved. To meet this goal, the Workshop recommended that action should be taken along the lines of the proposals made in the report of the Secretary-General, giving regard to the promotion of more effective inter-agency cooperation at the global, regional and field levels.

VII. AREAS FOR POLICY ACTION TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE ENERGY FUTURE

25. The Workshop took note of the areas where policy action needs to be considered to bring about sustainable energy. The Workshop identified amongst others the following points:

- Identification of the need for energy services;

- Identification of sources and technologies that should be developed and applied in a sustainable fashion;

- Administrative, legal, social and economic barriers that hinder the implementation of sustainable energy options;

- Development of an integrated approach to a sustainable energy future;

- Ways and means to monitor and evaluate the progress made;

- Energy pricing, taxes and subsidies;

- Development of new, clean technologies and the creation of markets for these technologies;

- Integration of energy policies into environmental policies and into policies to develop fields like the agricultural, transport, industrial and utility sector;

- Internalization of external costs of energy consumption;

- Support for demonstration projects on the efficient use of energy and the implementation of clean and safe energy technologies;

- Development of indicators and criteria to measure and compare energy efficiency;

- Incorporation of gender concerns, as contained in the Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration;

- Identification of measures to develop and implement sustainable energy options in the framework of marketization and globalization.

Appendix

EXPERT WORKSHOP: "FOSTERING THE LINKAGE BETWEEN ENERGY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS"

In paragraphs 20 and 24 of the report on the Expert Workshop "Fostering the Linkage between Energy and Sustainable Development within the International Institutions" reference is made to paragraphs 65 and 66 of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Inventory of Ongoing Energy-Related Programmes and Activities of Entities within the United Nations System, on Coordination of Such Activities and on Arrangements Needed to Foster the Linkage between Energy and Sustainable Development within the System". For ease of reference, the full text of these paragraphs is given below.

Paragraphs 65 and 66 of the report of the Secretary-General read:

"B. The role of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development

"65. Currently, the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development is the only body in the United Nations that addresses all aspects of the energy discussion. The UNCNRSEED should continue to play a useful role in furthering United Nations policy discussion in the field of energy after 1997. However, the modalities of the Committee's functioning could be adjusted in order to enhance its effectiveness. This could include:

(i) Better representation of Governments; currently not all regions have designated their representatives;

(ii) Better dissemination of reports;

(iii) Better participation of the organizations of the United Nations system, including regional commissions, in the work of the Committee, including in the preparation of reports;

(iv) Establishment of links between the Committee and non-United Nations organizations dealing with energy, such as IAEA and WEC;

(v) Changing the Committee's pattern of reporting so that it will report to the Economic and Social Council through the Commission on Sustainable Development (which already was the case for some of the Committee's reports) with a view to ensuring greater integration of the results of the Committee's work in the sustainable development discussion. Furthermore, there is a need to ensure that the Committee's work programme takes into account relevant requirements of the Commission on Sustainable Development."

"C. Improving inter-agency cooperation

"66. It is essential to promote more effective arrangements for inter-agency coordination and cooperation in the field of energy, both at the global and field levels. This could include:

(a) Making energy a recurrent item on the agenda of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) and ensuring linkages with energy-related aspects of work of other ACC bodies, including the task forces established in follow-up of recent global conferences;

(b) Convening ad hoc meetings of relevant organizations, preferably back-to-back with or in the margins of other meetings (like IACSD or UNCNRSEED) in order to:

(i) Elaborate a common approach as suggested in paragraphs 61 to 64 above;

(ii) Discuss arrangements related to the provision of system-wide support to policy-making processes, including in UNCNRSEED and the Commission on Sustainable Development;

(iii) Promote greater policy coherence between intergovernmental and governing bodies throughout the United Nations system;

(iv) Exchange information and discuss lessons learned from various projects and activities;

(v) Promote data comparability;

(c) Discussing specific arrangements aimed at enhancing the United Nations system's capacity for information exchange in the field of energy. This may include the establishment of an electronic database on energy-related activities, programmes and experiences which, eventually, may be linked with other relevant databases that exist in the United Nations system."